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NEWS NOTES

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ACTION SUGGESTED: To voice concern over the growing violations of human rights in Liberia and to appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of Ezekiel Pajibo and the many others presently held as political prisoners of conscience, please write:

His Excellency Samuel K. Doe
Head of State
Executive Mansion
Monrovia, Liberia
West Africa

With copies to: Ambassador G. Toe Washington
Liberian Embassy
5201-16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20011

Ms. Connie Freeman
Department of State
AF/W Room 4250
Washington, DC 20520

For more information, and for a copy of the Liberian Human Rights Issues Report write:

Society of African Missions
Social Concerns Department
Box 4468
Washington, DC 20017 (202) 529-4200

17. NEW YORK'S CARDINAL O'CONNOR EXTENDS SUPPORT TO PERSECUTED EAST TIMORESE

On August 28 a letter by John Cardinal O'Connor, Chairman of the U.S. Bishops Social Development and World Peace Committee, was released on behalf of the United States Catholic Conference supporting the "struggle to preserve and enhance the dignity of life" of Catholics in East Timor. The Cardinal assured Msgr. Carlos Filipe Ximeness Belo, Apostolic Administrator of Dili, East Timor, of his prayers for "the right of your people to live in peace and freedom."

In comments preceding the Cardinal's letter, the National Catholic Office for Information noted that the largely Catholic population of East Timor has been decimated by military action, disease, and malnutrition since the Indonesian troops invaded the territory when the Portuguese withdrew in 1975. It also noted that the U.S. government, which supplies Indonesia with most of its military equipment, acknowledges Indonesia's de facto rule over East Timor, while admitting that a valid act of self-determination by the Timorese has not taken place. Indonesia still lacks the approval of the United Nations for its actions in East Timor.

Apparently to improve the image of their ally, the U.S. State Department has updated its background report on East Timor, claiming that the Indonesian government is building roads, schools, hospitals and so on and that international relief agencies have complete access there. Concerning human rights, the report states "...recent new reports of atrocities are virtually impossible to verify without additional information..." It also states that "new local military officials exhibit greater sensitivity to human rights concerns..."

In contrast to the State Department's view, Msgr. Belo recently asserted that his territory is still a "prison" where fighting continues and outside reporters are severely restricted. In the same vein, Bishop Francis Murphy of Baltimore criticized the State Department's poor human rights stance on this issue in a June 25 press conference. At the same time he applauded the efforts of Amnesty International for documenting human rights abuses in a new 92-page report on East Timor. (Write AI for the report: 322 8th Ave. New York, NY 10001)